SELF CARE

Part I: Cuts, Scrapes and Stitches
Caring for Wounds

How should I clean a wound?
The best way to clean a cut, scrape or puncture wound (such as from a nail) is with cool water. You can hold the wound under running water or fill a tub with cool water and pour it from a cup over the wound.

Use soap and a soft washcloth to clean the skin around the wound. Try to keep soap out of the wound itself because soap can cause irritation. Use tweezers that have been cleaned in isopropyl alcohol to remove any dirt that remains in the wound after washing.

What about bleeding?
Bleeding helps clean out wounds. Most small cuts or scrapes will stop bleeding in a short time. Wounds on the face, head or mouth will sometimes bleed a lot because these areas are rich in blood vessels.

To stop the bleeding, apply firm but gentle pressure on the cut with a clean cloth, tissue or piece of gauze. If the blood soaks through the gauze or cloth you are holding over the cut, do not take it off. Just put more gauze or another cloth on top of what you already have in place and apply more pressure. If your wound is on an arm or leg, raising it above your heart will also help slow the bleeding.
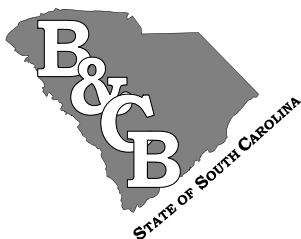
Should I use an antibiotic ointment?
Antibiotic ointments (such as Bacitracin) help healing by keeping out infection and by keeping the wound clean and moist. A bandage does pretty much the same thing. If you have stitches, your doctor will tell you whether he or she wants you to use an antibiotic ointment. Most minor cuts and scrapes will heal just fine without antibiotic ointment, but it can speed healing and help reduce scarring.

What should I do about scabs?
Nothing. Scabs are the body's way of bandaging itself. They form to protect wounds from dirt. It is best to leave them alone and not pick at them. They will fall off by themselves when the time is right.

Source: American Academy of Family Physicians